

February 7, 2008

**WASHINGTON, D.C. --** U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon today voted for legislation to address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it harder for qualified students to go to college. February 7, 2008

**WASHINGTON, D.C. --** U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon today voted for legislation to address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it harder for qualified students to go to college.

By an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 354 to 58, the House approved the College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137), which would reform and strengthen the nation's higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families. The legislation is the second major bill Rep. Melancon has voted for to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students. Last year, Congress enacted into law a \$20 billion increase in college financial aid over the next five years, the largest increase in student aid since the G.I. Bill of 1944.

**"Soaring tuition costs are pushing a college education out of reach for many middle and lower income students in Louisiana and around the country," Rep. Melancon said. "This legislation will encourage colleges to rein in tuition increases, while also helping families meet costs by making federal financial aid more accessible. Smart students who work hard shouldn't be denied a better future just because they can't afford rising tuition costs."**

An October 2007 report from the College Board showed that, over the previous five years, tuition and fees had increased across the board, at public and private colleges and at two-year and four-year colleges. Tuition and fees at four-year colleges nationwide grew by almost 4 percent between 2006-07 and 2007-8, when adjusted for inflation. The bill would address these rising prices by encouraging colleges to rein in price increases, ensuring that states maintain their commitments to higher education funding, and providing students and families with consumer friendly information on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases ( [click here](#) for details).

The legislation also strengthens provisions previously approved by the House to avoid conflicts of interest in the student loan programs ( [click here](#) for details). The bill's new provisions include requiring better consumer disclosures and protections on private student loans. Together these protections form a Bill of Rights for college consumers.

Rep. Melancon continued, **"A better educated and skilled workforce is the key to Louisiana's future prosperity, and I am proud to support legislation that will help prepare more students in our state for those jobs."**

In addition, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act would:

- Streamline the federal student financial aid application process ( [click here](#) for details);

- Make textbook costs more manageable for students by, among other things, helping them plan for textbook expenses in advance of each semester ( [click here](#) for more details);
- Allow students to receive year-round Pell Grant scholarships;
- Strengthen college readiness and support programs for minority and low-income students ( [click here](#) for more details);
- Increase college aid and support programs for veterans and military families;
- Improve safety on college campuses and help schools recover and rebuild after a disaster;
- Ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities; and
- Strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness by boosting science, technology, and foreign language educational opportunities.

H.R. 4137 is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the primary federal law aimed at expanding college access for low- and middle-income students. The bill is supported by a broad coalition of students, colleges and universities, consumer rights advocacy groups, minority organizations, and more.

For more information on the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, see the fact sheet below.

###

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act  
Expanding College Access, Strengthening our Future

A college education continues to be the best path to the middle class. But more and more, high college prices and other obstacles are putting a college degree further out of reach for America's students. In addition to rising tuition, students and their families face an overly complex federal student aid application process and a student loan industry mired in conflicts of interest and corrupt lending practices.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act will continue this Congress' effort to make college more affordable and accessible. This bill would reform our higher education system so that it operates in the best interests of students and families, while boosting our competitiveness and strengthening our future. The legislation would:

**Encourage colleges to rein in price increases and provide consumers with helpful information**

- Ensures states maintain higher education funding and provides incentives, such as additional need-based aid, to encourage colleges to hold down price increases.
- Creates a user-friendly website to provide students and families with helpful information about college pricing when making important education decisions.
- Holds colleges and universities accountable for their tuition hikes.

### **Restore integrity and accountability to the student loan programs**

- Requires institutions and lenders to adopt strict codes of conduct.
- Provides students with fair and full information about their borrowing options when taking out and repaying student loans, including the terms and conditions of both federal and private student loans; and promotes financial literacy and education for students and parents.
- Protects students from aggressive marketing practices by lenders.

### **Simplify the federal student aid application process**

- Streamlines the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, and creates an easy-to-navigate two-page FAFSA-EZ form for low-income families.
- Provides families with extra time to plan for their college expenses.
- Encourages the Department of Education to coordinate with the Internal Revenue Service to use information that the government already has.

### **Make textbook costs more manageable**

- Provides students with advance information on textbook pricing to help them plan for expenses before each semester.
- Ensures that colleges and faculty have full textbook pricing information when making purchasing decisions.

### **Expand college access and support for low-income and minority students**

- Makes college more affordable for low-income and non-traditional students by allowing students to receive Pell Grant scholarship aid year round.

- Expands funding for graduate student programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and other minority serving schools.
- Strengthens the TRIO and GEAR UP college readiness and support programs for low-income and first-generation students.

### **Increase college aid and support for veterans and military families**

- Creates a new scholarship program for active duty military personnel and family members, including children and spouses of active duty military service members or veterans.
- Establishes support centers to help veterans succeed in college and graduate.
- Ensures fairness in student aid and housing aid for veterans to make it easier for them to go to college while also fulfilling their military service duties.

### **Ensure equal college opportunities for students with disabilities**

- Establishes a national center to provide support services and best practices for colleges, students with disabilities, and their families.
- Helps colleges recruit, retain, and graduate students with disabilities and improves education materials and facilities.
- Expands eligibility for Pell Grant scholarships and other need-based aid for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Boost campus safety and disaster readiness plans**

- Helps all colleges develop and implement state-of-the-art emergency systems and campus safety plans, and requires the Department of Education to develop and maintain a disaster plan in preparation for emergencies.
- Creates a National Center for Campus Safety at the Department of Justice to work in collaboration with the COPS Program.
- Establishes a disaster relief loan program to help schools recover and rebuild in the event of a disaster.

### **Encourage colleges to adopt sustainable and energy-efficient practices**

- Creates a grant program to help colleges and universities design and implement sustainable practices.
- Convenes the first-ever higher education summit on sustainability to examine how to implement energy efficient and sustainable practices at institutions of higher education.

### **Strengthen our workforce and our competitiveness**

- Creates programs to bolster students' interest in science, technology and critical foreign languages through collaborations with businesses and other stakeholders.
- Improves teacher training and development programs and focuses on recruiting teachers into high demand science and technology fields.
- Encourages students to enter vital public service jobs by authorizing up to \$10,000 in loan forgiveness for public defenders, prosecutors, firefighters, military service members, first responders, law enforcement officers, educators, nurses, and others serving the public interest.